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SELF-SUPPORTING

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A DUOLOGUE

By

MARGARET YOUNG

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SELF-SUPPORTING

CHARACTERS

MRS. GORDON.

KITTY *Her niece.*

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SELF-SUPPORTING

SCENE.—*A small bare room.*

TIME.—*The present.*

The stage is empty.

A knock at the door. Pause. Louder knock. Pause. Repeated ad. lib. Then the handle is tried. Then

MRS. GORDON *opens door tentatively—then looks in—then comes in. She is a good-looking, pleasant, well-dressed woman. She looks round her blankly. Then she catches sight of an overturned work-basket on the table. Goes up quickly to examine it. Business of pricking her finger on needle stuck in table-cloth. Takes up book—laughs, puts it down. Takes a big stick from corner, examines it, puzzled and alarmed. As she puts it down, catches sight of an unopened letter stuck up conspicuously somewhere. Goes quickly to it—reads address, business of great satisfaction. Pockets it. Turning, catches sight of handcuffs and chain hanging on wall. Start of horror. While she approaches them, slowly, lorgnette in hand, and finally ventures to touch and handle them:—*

Door, which was left ajar, is pushed wide, and enter KITTY, a pretty young girl, in a pretty-coloured but very cheap ready-made blouse-suit, cheap hat, no gloves, no ornaments. She carries a roll of paper and a very small grocery parcel.

She runs in, as if dismayed at door being ajar. Stops. Looks. Sees MRS. GORDON'S back: Start of delight and scream.

KITTY. *Aunt Grace!*

MRS. GORDON (*turning*). *Kitty!*

KITTY. *Oh! (Runs into her arms and clings to her, her face hid on her shoulder.)*

MRS. GORDON (*agitated*). There, there, there! Oh! Kitty, Kitty! The hunt we've had for you! (*KITTY as before all the while MRS. GORDON goes on petting and soothing her, and pouring out talk.*) And even now, you know, I wasn't sure we found you, at first. (*Laughs shakily.*) The workbasket looked like you.

KITTY (*without lifting her head*). Like me?

MRS. GORDON. Standing on its head.

KITTY (*fiercely, still clinging to her*). Aunt Grace!

MRS. GORDON. And the book. So deep! Moments with Plato. Is it teaching you're making your living by, Kitty?

KITTY (*as before*). Teaching! Oh!

MRS. GORDON. But I couldn't be sure of you till I saw that the letter was addressed to you.

KITTY (*jumps away from her*). Letter! Where!
(N.B.—*All foregoing must be played very quickly.*)

MRS. GORDON. In my pocket. For the present.

KITTY (*imploringly*). Oh! Aunt Grace, give it me! Oh! Aunt Grace, you *don't* mean it's from——

MRS. GORDON. Your Uncle Jim.

KITTY. Uncle Jim! (*Disappointed. Then warmly.*) Oh! but I do want it, all the same. I want it very *much*.

MRS. GORDON. You shall have it. But we'll have our talk first. It's *just* like him—to insist on sending a letter before I came—and risk spoiling everything. You're a pair of you, you and your Uncle Jim, for obstinacy.

KITTY. Aunt Grace! We're *not* obs——

MRS. GORDON (*not stopping*). Just a *pair* of you! I always told him you never would have run away from home to be self-supporting, if he would only have *encouraged* the idea for two minutes and a half.

KITTY. Aunt Grace, there's *one* thing Uncle Jim and I *do* agree on. *We are not* obstinate.

MRS. GORDON. What *are* you?

KITTY (*considers, then with dignity*). *Firm.* (*Runs suddenly into her arms.*) You darling, dear Aunt Grace, I *am* so glad you've come."

MRS. GORDON. It's a sight for sore eyes seeing you again, Kitty.

KITTY. And you. (*Then draws back severely.*)
So long as you come alone.

MRS. GORDON (*cheerfully*). Quite alone, as you see.

KITTY (*rather depressed*). Yes. I see.

MRS. GORDON. Quite alone. And ready to be turned out this minute if you choose, but not—*not* without a cup of tea. Even in an Industrial Dwelling people drink tea. I know it—I've read about it—in statistics.

KITTY. Oh! dear Aunt Grace! It is unlucky! I'll get some in one minute, but---

MRS. GORDON (*sternly*). You have no tea in the house?

KITTY. Not to-day. But I lent some on Tuesday to the people overhead, and I'm sure they'll---

MRS. GORDON. You feather-brain! You've got the tea all the time, I believe. That little white parcel you brought in. Why—oh! *what* is it? (*drops it.*)

KITTY. Yes. German sausage. I was going to have some for my dinner—(*adds hurriedly*) with other things, of course.

MRS. GORDON. Such as?

KITTY. Oh! bread and—and all that sort of thing. Would you (*hesitatingly*) take a little of it now?

MRS. GORDON (*nervously*). Well, dear, it's most appetising; but—to quench thirst—I hardly think—no—don't run away. The tea can wait. First you must tell me---

KITTY. First of all (*on the floor beside her*), you must swear, solemnly swear, not to tell any one where I am. Any one! Any one!

MRS. GORDON. Meaning Harry, I suppose?

KITTY. I didn't for a moment suppose that *Harry* could wish to know the whereabouts of his most particular *bête noire*—a strong-minded woman.

MRS. GORDON. Of course not. He never thinks of any woman but *you*.

KITTY (*with a wild little laugh*). Oh! you cold, crushing, sarcastic, horrible, dear old aunt; you don't mean to say he still——(*Pulls up.*) Well, it doesn't matter your telling anybody—for I'm leaving this place.

MRS. GORDON. I'll answer for that—I mean—why you are leaving, dear? Is the attendance not good?

KITTY. Oh! *that's* all right. That's *me*. No, but they've such a stupid plan about the rent. You pay *in advance*. Just fancy! Isn't it ridiculous?

MRS. GORDON (*observing her*). Ah! you don't like paying in advance?

KITTY. It's silly, I think.

MRS. GORDON (*suddenly*). Could you tell me the time?

KITTY (*furiously embarrassed*). Oh! it is unlucky! I haven't my watch—on.

MRS. GORDON. So I see. Didn't you take your dressing-bag with you when you went bread-winning?

KITTY. The dear, lovely silver-fitted bag you gave me? I should *think* so.

MRS. GORDON. I thought there was a clock in that?

KITTY. The sweetest little——

MRS. GORDON. Then, perhaps, you could tell me the time by the *clock*.

KITTY. Oh! it is unlucky! I haven't it—*with* me.

MRS. GORDON. I saw there were none of your pretty things about. I suppose there're all—stored?

KITTY. Well, I don't know that you would call it—exactly—stored. Oh! don't you think it's perfectly horrid of you to go on *talking* about the time instead of *using* it—instead of telling me all about everybody?

MRS. GORDON. Everybody but Harry.

KITTY. You've told me all about him. It's my dear old Uncle Jim I want to know about. How **is** he?

MRS. GORDON. Dreadfully angry.

KITTY (*nodding*). I don't see how even he could help that—by this time.

MRS. GORDON. He says you rejected his overtures at Christmas.

KITTY. Overtures? Insults, I call them. Do you know he got hold of my address—fortunately I'd just left—and he dared to——

MRS. GORDON. Well?

KITTY. To send me a case of portwine and bottled soups : when he knows how absolutely determined I am to earn my own bread !

MRS. GORDON. Well, dear, bread. Not wine or soups.

KITTY. I believe you knew about it.

MRS. GORDON. Why, of course, we were all delighted you were found. And, indeed, Harry went straight off——

KITTY (*much moved*). Oh ! did he ? Did he really ?

MRS. GORDON. But the landlady pretended to know nothing at all about you, and your dear uncle was so terribly put out at being made to look a fool——

KITTY. He couldn't look a fool, the darling.

MRS. GORDON (*with attempted solemnity*). That, I'm sorry to say, my dear Kitty, the end of the whole thing is—he has—well, in fact, he has disinherited you.

KITTY (*with a gasp of delight*). Disin——

MRS. GORDON.—herited you, my dear.

KITTY. Aunt Grace, you're joking ! Oh ! I can't believe it. Oh ! how perfectly sweet of him ! Disinherited me ! The dear ! Oh ! tell me, tell me—how did he do it ? After prayers—before all the servants—with his spectacles pushed back up on his sweet old crinkly forehead ? And his first words *most ferocious*—the voice that belongs to the very worst things—to—to reading *Punch* before

the others have looked at the pictures—and the rest all trickling off into gentleness.

MRS. GORDON. Never mind *how*. He's *done* it ! He's left everything to——

KITTY. Oh ! to *Harry*, of course. I knew he must leave everything to Harry if I could once bring him to the disinheriting point. How he could ever dare to ask a man like Harry to live on his wife !

MRS. GORDON. His wife ? That's to say ?

KITTY. Me, of course—I mean it was me—I mean it was going to have been me. Oh !—you know what I mean.

MRS. GORDON. I hope *you* know, my poor child ; for your uncle has absolutely cut you off with a shilling.

KITTY (*rapturously smiling*). A shilling, too. How pretty of him. I'll set it in diamonds, if I have to sell my——(*Her voice drops suddenly as she looks blankly at her bare hands and dress, and round the empty room.*) Oh, well, he must live fifty years longer, that's all, and by that time I'll (*faltering*) perhaps—I'll have begun—to—make——

MRS. GORDON. I'm afraid you've not, so far, made a great deal.

KITTY (*with careful truthfulness*). Not such a very great deal—not exactly *made*. You see (*relapsing into confidence*) it was unlucky ! First I had the loveliest situation to teach two little boys—Harry said I was a daisy with boys. You remember—the

lodge children on Sunday. Well—these two had the most comfortable parents you ever saw ; they didn't know anything and they thought I knew everything. It was the dressing-bag did it, I think.

MRS. GORDON. Then your old aunt got you that ?

KITTY. Yes, but I did try. I bought all the best books. I had the money then——

MRS. GORDON. Yes. Before you made your living.

KITTY. And I worked so hard. I was never less than three lessons ahead of them ; (*piteously*) I'm very conscientious. Aunt Grace, really.

MRS. GORDON. I'm sure you are.

KITTY (*tragically*). But *Julius Cæsar* upset everything ! You see they took a box, and the boys and me. And I thought it was going to be *such* fun. But—would you believe it ?—from beginning to end—from those silly red men carrying about golf clubs down to the sort of sign-post the soldier sticks up to die under—they made the whole thing just one gigantic examination paper. *Such* questions ! *Oh*, such questions ! I got cold and hot and cold again with fright, and, sure enough, directly we got home they sent for me and said it was a woman of *culture* (*sob*) they wanted to train their sons, and so—well, really, *that* was unlucky, wasn't it ?

MRS. GORDON (*indignantly*). It was a piece of the most outrageous impertinence. *Culture* indeed ! When they had *you* !

KITTY (*cheerfully drying her eyes*). "They had me, but they did not keep me long." That's Shakespeare—anyhow, I learnt something on the stage.

MRS. GORDON. The stage! You don't mean to tell me you tried *that* next?

KITTY. No. *Quite* next I was a lady guide. Because, you know, Harry always said that for knowing one's way about London he'd back me against— And they gave me a post at once. It was that neat little travelling dress of Redfern's—the grey check—did it, I think.

MRS. GORDON. Then your old uncle got you that?

KITTY. Yes. But I *did* try. I bought that stick to start with.

MRS. GORDON. The shillelagh!

KITTY. And a field-glass—but I haven't the field-glass *with* me. I knew the sort of things for a guide. And the first three days I got on capitally. I had nothing but Americans, and they went to such places: oh! such funny places—past the *Savoy*—past [St. Paul's! Yes. But I didn't mind it—not one bit. I had such perfect confidence in them. They used to start suddenly with joy, and say: "Botley Street! Are we actually in Botley Street? Why, then, I guess the third turning on the left-hand side will take us along to the sign of the Hedgehog, the vurry identical tavern where the illustrious Beaumont and Fletcher are—erroneously—reported to have been stood drinks by Sir Francis Drake." And I always

said "Yes"—I had such perfect confidence in the M—and they were always right, and they wrote afterwards to the office to say that in their opinion their eminent countryman Henry James had strangely underrated the intelligence of the average Englishwoman. *That* was nice, wasn't it—to be a credit to one's country!

MRS. GORDON. Charming. Why didn't you stick to it?

KITTY. I *did* try. But you see the next was an Australian—a most successful farmeress. And her interest was—chemical manures. And I fainted and had to be taken home in a cab. So they said I was lacking in stamina. It *was* unlucky, wasn't it?

MRS. GORDON. Brutal. And so you tried the stage?

KITTY. Yes. Because, you know, Harry always *did* say—— And I got an engagement straight off. It was that fascinating umbrella handle did it, I think—the snake with the emerald eyes, you know.

MRS. GORDON. That Harry brought from Cashmere. Then it was your cousin got you that.

KITTY. Yes. But I did try. And when I had to give it up. Oh dear! (*Hides her face.*)

MRS. GORDON. Tell me all about it, dear. Everybody knows how prettily you act. But there are a great many drawbacks, of course, so much jealousy in the company.

KITTY. Oh! it wasn't that. They didn't seem

to see anything to be jealous about. The company were all [just simply] as sweet as they could live. But they felt so dreadfully sorry about it.

MRS. GORDON. About what?

KITTY. My acting, you know. Being like nothing on a stick.

MRS. GORDON. Like what?

KITTY. Nothing—on a stick. That was just exactly what it was like, you know. And they couldn't make it out. They said *any* fool could act, so they were sure *I* should get it, in time. But it made them so sad. They would think of plans in the night, and come round in the morning to tell me.

MRS. GORDON. *Who* would think of *what* plans?

KITTY. Plans to make me act. Everybody, down to the baggage-man. I can't tell you what the baggage-man was to me. And at last they agreed all I wanted was my chance.

MRS. GORDON. And you couldn't get it, just what I've always heard about the stage. Some one, no doubt, was working against you.

KITTY. Oh! Chances! I had plenty of chances. But none of the chances happened to suit *me*. It *was* unlucky, wasn't it? Every chance I had, the others would get so frightfully excited, and wait about in the wings to send me on and take me off. And every chance I had they grew sadder—and more comforting. It was telling on them. It wasn't fair to the management. The papers began to notice

"a certain want of go" in the company. I knew *whose go* was wanted. But I'm so selfish; I should have stuck to it still, only the real trouble was----
(*hesitates.*)

MRS. GORDON. Don't be afraid to tell me anything. I saw (*tremulously*) what you have hanging up there.

KITTY. My manacles! Oh, those are all right.

MRS. GORDON. "*All—right?*"

KITTY. Yes. My manacles (*goes up to them*) were for my big part! (*puts a hand on them tenderly*) "*The Dumb Captive!*"—I made a hit in *that*.

MRS. GORDON (*turning to look at her*). Did you really?

KITTY. Rather! (*Drawing herself up.*) I was carried on. (*She becomes rigid.*) *Silent! Veiled!* (*Very impressively. A pause of emotion. Then she comes cheerfully back to her aunt.*) I can tell you that *did go!* (*Sits on the floor again.*)

MRS. GORDON. *It did go?* (*Hesitates, then.*) In that case—why —why did you?

KITTY (*confidential again*). Well, you see, the part *didn't* command a big salary. It was a *fine performance*, the manager said, but the dummy was easier to carry. Of course I *saw* his point of view, but (*stops*) the thing was——(*Stops.*)

MRS. GORDON. I can quite understand (*indignantly*). The whole life wore on your delicate nerves. The strain of it. The excitement of it—the——

KITTY (*turns impressively, putting a hand on hers*). The *awfully* good appetite of it, Aunt Grace!

MRS. GORDON (*gasps*). Good *what*?

KITTY (*nods*). Good appetite. That's it. The stage does give you the most *appallingly* good appetite.

MRS. GORDON. But, I don't understand. If *that* was all—

KITTY. *All!* You wait till you've tried! (*Then rapidly.*) A good appetite for breakfast and a good appetite for dinner and a good appetite for tea and a good appetite for supper, and a *fairly* good appetite for in-betweens. (*Takes breath.*) *And* no more salary than you can expect for being like nothing-on-a-stick—that is, generally, I mean, not counting the Dumb captive, of course. (*Takes breath.*) *And* always something or other new that you must buy for your parts—pigtails for Queens——

MRS. GORDON. Pigtails!

KITTY. Queens in Legitimate have pigtails, always—and topboots for boys.

MRS. GORDON. Boys! Kitty!

KITTY. And it's all very well for you to say: "Is that *all*?" Aunt Grace—but all *I* can say is, I kept getting smaller and smaller. And my appetite kept getting bigger and bigger, till at last I caught cold and—well—that was the time I sold my watch. (*Looks down nervously.*) Not exactly sold——

MRS. GORDON. Kitty! What do you mean?

KITTY. Oh! I never went there myself, really.

The baggage-man did it all. He was lodging next door at Great Pelton, and he sent round some wine because he said—well, he *said* it was because he *couldn't stand the noise* my coughing made. Well, I know it was horridly conventional of me—but I couldn't take it—somehow. And as soon as he saw I meant it, he told me—what to do about my watch. And after that he managed—all those things for me, so nicely. And brought me all the ti—the tickets—receipts. But, when it came to eating my frocks, I felt I really must find some cheaper way of making my living—and yesterday (*her voice breaks*) I thought I'd found it.

MRS. GORDON. What was that?

KITTY. Sick-nursing. Oh! I had set my heart on it. Yes, Aunt Grace, careers are all very well, but if you knew how dreadfully—dreadfully—I long—long—long—for this sort of thing (*sobbing and hugging MRS. GORDON'S knees*).

MRS. GORDON. But, Kitty, they don't do that in hospitals.

KITTY. Oh! you know what I mean. To make somebody—just a little glad of you. And now—to-day—they're afraid I won't do—not strong enough—something about my heart. And (*distractedly*) there's only one thing more I can think of—to be an *author*. I just ran out to get some ruled paper for that; but if that fails—I really don't know—what—I shall—do.

MRS. GORDON. I'll tell you, dear. If it's sick-nursing you want. You haven't heard yet. Don't be frightened—but your uncle has been very, very ill.

KITTY. Uncle Jim! And I sat here talking nonsense. Oh! my dear, dear Uncle Jim (*putting on her hat*). What is it?

MRS. GORDON. A neglected cold. He's better. But he wants you dreadfully.

KITTY. Wants me! And you never told me!

MRS. GORDON. I wasn't sure you'd come.

KITTY. Come! To my own darling uncle! And when he's behaved so beautifully about the—shilling—and all that. I'll nurse him till I die—heart or no heart.

MRS. GORDON. Oh! we'll soon set the heart right, I hope, with proper advice.

(*Knock.*)

(*Quickly*) Pack up your trunk—if it isn't—ahem! stored—and I'll be back for you in an hour.

KITTY. Oh! must you go?

(*Knock.*)

Who can that be?

MRS. GORDON. The heart specialist, I expect—(*whispers*) Harry.

KITTY. Harry! Oh, I oughtn't to keep you, if you really have to go (*hurriedly getting her her gloves and parasol*).

MRS. GORDON (*laughing*). It looks as if I had to.

KITTY. Then, good-bye, dear Aunt Grace—and don't be a minute more than—than just the hour—and a half——

(*Exit* MRS. GORDON, *laughing*.)

Harry! (*Ecstatically*.) Harry! (*Drawing herself up with dignity*.)

MRS. GORDON (*outside*). Yes, she's expecting you.

KITTY (*with a cry of joy*). Harry!

(*Runs out to meet him*.)

CURTAIN.

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